R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 546 EA 000 998

A NEW FOCUS FOR SCHOOL DESEGREGATION.

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PUB DATE 6 DEC 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.64 14P.

DESCRIPTORS- *SCHOOL INTEGRATION, *NEGRO EDUCATION, DEFACTO SEGREGATION, *FEDERAL PROGRAMS, *STATE PROGRAMS, *EQUAL EDUCATION, STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION, COMPENSATORY EDUCATION, EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, URBAN SCHOOLS, CIVIL RIGHTS, NEIGHBORHOOD INTEGRATION, BOARDS OF EDUCATION, ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL, CINCINNATI,

EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE SCHOOL DESEGREGATION HAVE NOT YET SUCCEEDED. BOTH FEDERAL AND STATE PROGRAMS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED IN VARYING DEGREES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. HOWEVER, ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OFTEN FAIL BECAUSE OF OPPOSITION OR INVOLVEMENT WITH SUCH RELATED PROBLEMS AS RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION. RATHER THAN EQUAL EDUCATION, THE REAL GOAL OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IS THE REALIZATION OF EQUAL AND FULL CITIZENSHIP IN AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR EACH CHILD, REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, OR CREED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT A FORUM OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER (CINCINNATI, DECEMBER 6, 1967). (JK)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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ED015546

A NEW FOCUS FOR SCHOOL DESEGREGATION*

An Address by Harold Howe II
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The segregated classroom is an old and familiar scar in American education--so familiar as to have won a kind of shame-faced acceptance in even our most progressive communities. In the South, for decade upon decade the Negro has been confined by law to the inferior education offered under the dual school system. In the informally but nonetheless effectively segregated schools of the North, his plight has carefully been ignored.

Racial isolation still persists. The dual school system may gradually be disappearing in the South, but most Southern Negroes continue to go to school only with other Negroes. The de facto or neighborhood segregation of the North still separates fellow Americans of different colors. Nevertheless, significant change has occurred within recent years.

The change is that today it is a rare school board that does not have this matter on its agenda, that does not at least acknowledge that the average American Negro is not receiving an average American education. Segregated education remains a desperately troublesome problem, but no longer is it kept under the table. That is no small accomplishment, possibly signalling a new direction of unprecedented significance in American education.

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*Before a Forum of the Jewish Community Center, at the Jewish Community Center Auditorium, Cincinnati, Ohio, on Wednesday, December 6, 1967, at 8:30 p.m.

Much of the impetus for this development has been stimulated by the character and spirit of the programs which Congress has called upon the Office of Education to administer. I am not referring here to that section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964--Title VI--under which the States and local school districts are impelled toward desegregating their schools by the threat of being denied Federal funds.

More affirmatively and creatively--and in my opinion more effectively--the drive against segregated schools is gathering strength because school boards and school administrators are capitalizing on the array of Federal programs directly aimed at helping the schools serve their students better. During the past three years no less than 38 major education bills have been enacted into law by Congress--bills that have given our schools and colleges new leverage to move against old, ingrained problems: segregation not the least among them.

For us in the Office of Education as well as for the State and local school authorities who are carrying them out it has been an exciting experience to participate in the launching of these programs. We have been part of what one observer described as the beginning of "an educational revolution." We have seen school systems across the country determine that segregated education is suspect education, for black students and white students alike, and therefore deserving of priority attention.

And so at last the battle against racial isolation in the schools has been joined where it must be joined--at the State and local levels.

If there is going to be real change in the racial arrangements and attitudes of the public schools of America, it is going to come not as a result of Federal pressures alone but as a result of State and local initiative. Some States and some communities have already accepted responsibility in this area; and particularly in those States where the State Board of Education has taken the leadership in developing a positive program, significant progress is being achieved.

In California, for example, the State Board of Education has declared that "primarily because of patterns of residential segregation, some of our schools are becoming racially segregated in fact, and this challenge to equality of educational opportunity must be met with the full thrust of our legal authority and moral leadership. We fully recognize (the Board's statement continues) that there are many social and economic forces at play which tend to facilitate de facto racial segregation, over which we have no control, but in all areas under our control or subject to our influence, the policy of elimination of existing segregation and curbing any tendency toward its growth must be given serious and thoughtful consideration by all persons involved at all levels."

Further, California changed its Administrative Code to establish a policy under which persons or agencies responsible for pupil assignment are called upon to exert every effort to eliminate segregation and to avoid the establishment of attendance areas which in practical effect discriminate or maintain segregated attendance patterns. The California legislature, in response to a request by the State Board, appropriated funds to establish a commission in the State Department of Education

which advises and assists school districts having pupil distribution problems.

In New Jersey the Commissioner of Education has on several occasions exercised his authority under State law to require school districts to file specific desegregation plans. When this authority was tested in a lawsuit, Justice Nathan Jacobs of the State Supreme Court said in the majority opinion: "In a society such as ours it is not enough that the 3 R's are being taught properly, for there are other vital considerations. The children must learn to respect and live with one another in multi-racial communities, and the earlier they do so the better."

In the State of New York, a similar point of view was expressed by Commissioner of Education James Allen in a memorandum to local school administrators that said: "Residential patterns and other factors may present serious obstacles to the attainment of racially balanced schools, but this does not release the school authorities of their responsibility for doing everything within their power, consistent with the principles of sound education, to achieve an equitable balance."

That responsibility for achieving "an equitable balance" is being exercised at the local level in communities in many sections of the Nation. Rochester, Waterbury, and Hartford, for example, have experimented on a small scale with arrangements to exchange students with nearby suburban communities; and Newark and Grand Rapids are planning similar efforts. Evanston, itself a suburb but one with a Negro population of its own, has achieved integration--with the assistance of a computer--by redrawing its attendance boundary lines so as to eliminate

all-Negro or all-white schools. Berkeley has moved in the same direction by re-casting its grade school structure as a preliminary to developing a large-scale student exchange plan.

Clearly, then, State and local education authorities not only have the segregation problem on their agenda, but in several sections of the country they have begun to take action. As I point with admiration to what some States and localities have done, I have to say in order to keep an honest perspective that these examples are exceptions rather than the rule. In most States and localities there is a high degree of concern but little positive action.

The challenge at this juncture is that of building momentum. The job will be a long, long time in the accomplishment. There will be setbacks and controversy and the temptation--perhaps the growing temptation--to throw up one's hands and walk away from the struggle.

It will be easy, in such a time, to wander down side streets. One of these side streets is the continuing debate over whether we should devote all our efforts to providing compensatory education--using the schools to make up for the disadvantages that children of poverty and children under the shadow of prejudice bring to the classroom--or whether we should concentrate solely on rearranging schools and students and teachers so as to achieve integration. Both of these courses are necessary, and I can see no reason why we should lock ourselves into a choice between one or the other. These two alternatives are not mutually exclusive. We must strive for integration and for improved educational services at the same time.

I grow increasingly impatient with those who hold out for an approach that adds up to a new era of separate but equal education in our northern cities. On the surface it may sound quite practical and forward looking to say that one is for integration in the long run but that the only thing to do now is to improve education for the minorities and the poor in the central city, even if they remain segregated.

Those who say this need to be honest with themselves. They need to recognize that what they are saying is that this country can combine quality education with economic and racial segregation. In doing so, they have offered to all those who openly or covertly want to avoid facing the social revolution of our times a convenient way to get the prickly matter of segregation off their consciences.

Too frequently and too easily we assume that building quality education into our segregated central city schools is a manageable task but that planning for and developing integration is somehow unmanageable and therefore impossible. I know of no evidence which indicates that one approach is more viable than the other. It seems to me that the facts are different for every city--different because the proportions of poor and minority group people are different, because attitudes and historical influences are different, and because political and leadership elements differ markedly.

I would go further and say that we are just as perplexed and unsure about how to bring about effective compensatory education as we are about how to desegregate our schools in the central city. We suppose that starting education earlier, bringing children who are three or four years

old into the schools, may be part of the answer. We find some hope in trying to enlist the parent in the affairs of the school. We consider new and different systems of school organization and of teaching and learning in an almost frantic search for the magic combination of new techniques and changed environmental influences which will somehow make successful in the schools a group of children with whom the schools are clearly all too unsuccessful now. It is important that we pursue these possibilities for making education serve the children of the poor. But as we do so it is important also that we keep the options open, that we accept no nostrums, and that we confront our failures and partial successes honestly.

The same can be said of the possibilities for school desegregation. A great variety of solutions has been suggested--ranging from school district reorganization (to include suburbs with cities, as advocated by the chairman of the Philadelphia School Board) to constructing special science or art facilities on the fringes of the city for use by both city and suburbs. Open enrollment, planned transfer of pupils, schools that serve broad areas of a city for special purposes, and a variety of other suggestions are being debated and explored. Here, also, it is important not to close down the options. There is a great deal we don't know and very little that we do. Emotion runs high about such matters as the sanctity and significance of the neighborhood school. We could do with considerably less emotion and considerably more disciplined examination of the choices we have. We also need to be realistic about the limitations on those choices. There is good reason to doubt whether

the schools alone control the elements which can bring fully integrated education to a major city like Chicago. But the schools must use the limited leverage they have in order to get assistance from noneducational agencies such as city planners and political authorities.

We need to keep constantly before us a point which frequently gets lost in all the argument and counterargument about the academic advantages of integrated education. It is that the primary reason to get rid of segregated schools is not to bring about improvement in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Although such improvement will almost certainly result from desegregation, through giving Negro youngsters access to the better teachers now monopolized by the whites and through providing Negro youngsters with examples of success in their schools, I still say that learning improvement is only a secondary reason for keeping integration on the agenda of our Boards of education.

The basic reason for integration of the schools is the same as the reason for equality in voting rights, for equal access to public accommodations regardless of race, for employment opportunity without regard to race, religion, or national origin, and for open housing. It is plainly and simply that segregation is un-American. It reflects the worst in our tradition rather than the noblest. In allowing segregation to continue without continued efforts on all fronts--schools, housing, and employment--to break it down, we endanger the future of our society, and we increase the possibility of reproducing South Africa in the United States without admitting it to ourselves.

We find ourselves in a time of frustration and disarray among those who five years ago were marching to new victories on behalf of Negro Americans. Five years ago the civil rights movement was strong and relatively unified. Confidence and courage flowed from the traditions of Birmingham and The March on Washington. Whites and Negroes were working together for the common end of a single society. The great Civil Rights Act of 1964 was impending.

Today we are in a totally different position. Revolt in our cities has frightened many people who want equal rights for all but who want even more to avoid trouble and sacrifice. A new super-militancy has emerged as an offshoot of the civil rights movement, paradoxically directed to separatism for Negroes in order to achieve their rights. The extremists of the Black Power group advocate force and violence in a society which has built into it the means for social revolution without the use of force and violence.

I would like to suggest that the frustrations we confront today should not surprise us. They are typical of any major social change. A movement for altering the position of 20 million Americans just cannot be expected to be orderly and pleasant and planned. It is bound to develop unconstructive and even violent offshoots. It is certain to breed disillusionment among those supporters who were theoretically convinced but unwilling to get involved.

At this state of our history our greatest need is to maintain the central commitment to a single society which so clearly characterized the civil rights movement from 1954 until about two years ago. In the

schools this commitment means that it is important for all American children to encounter all of America when they go to school--not just that part of America which has been segregated in one fashion or another to produce a segregated school.

And so the choice is not a simple one between integration or compensatory education. It is clear to anyone dealing with the problems of urban education that we need both, and we will continue to need both for a very long time. We may not integrate schools in cities like Washington, D.C., with a pupil population that is 93 percent Negro, for some time, but the school boards of such cities face numerous decisions each year with implications for the integration issue. As a school moves toward integration we need compensatory programs--not just for our Negro youngsters, but for a great many white children of poverty. We may have to introduce special programs into schools full of Negro youngsters, but we cannot allow these programs to diminish our effort toward integration.

We have been down this road before in our history, with the succession of foreign-born persons who have come to our shores--the waves of Germans and Italians and Jews and Orientals and others who have at one time or another constituted a minority group and have suffered poverty and the discrimination that characteristically seems to accompany that status. To a large degree, members of these groups have fought their way into the mainstream of American society, and it is easy to demand that the Negro--and the Puerto Rican and the Mexican-American--now do the same.

The situations are simply not comparable. To identify the plight of Negroes with that of other minority groups can be "misleading and dangerous," as the Civil Rights Commission has pointed out in a report released late last month. For one thing, as the Commission notes, "Negroes are not recent immigrants to our shores, but Americans of long standing." It is not that the Negro has failed to make an effort. It is that by and large, his efforts have been rejected.

Moreover, new and difficult conditions confront the Negro's current struggle for emergence into American society as that society undergoes rapid and far-reaching change. There is less and less opportunity for the willing laborer, the small businessman, the skilled craftsman. Technology is revolutionizing the job market. In another decade we will see employment advertisements for occupations we have not yet heard of. At that time, as now, the prerequisite for a good job will be a good education. And so the plight of the Negro American comes full circle. Short-changed educationally--as he is now, always has been, and will continue to be unless something is done about it--the Negro is short-changed in his opportunity to share in the benefits of the American society and make his full contribution to its strength and progress.

This waste is the concern of all of us, no matter what our race or color. It isn't just the black man's business to worry about the loss of his talents to this country or this city. It is the business of every one of us.

Cincinnati, as some of you may know, is one of my adopted home towns, and I know that Cincinnati has a great tradition of active public service

by its citizens. It has been a model of good government for other cities, and it has a strong tradition of supporting its public schools even though it has experienced some reverses in recent years.

It may seem baffling that a city possessing these great elements of strength has nevertheless been confronted by more problems than many cities that have made no comparable effort. Similar puzzles are presented by New Haven, which has acted imaginatively and productively to redo its central city; Detroit, with its high per capita income and low unemployment level; and by other forward-looking cities--all apparently reaping no reward for their foresight and good government.

The explanation for these paradoxes would seem to lie in large part in rising expectations and growing determination by the Negro residents of Cincinnati and New Haven and Detroit--qualities which in the long run will make these communities stronger, more vigorous, more cohesive, and more productive. Just as desegregation is now on education's agenda, so is education now on the Negro's agenda. And the disturbances that have wracked even our most forward-looking communities may demonstrate also that the traditional defenses against civic problems--conducted within traditional limitations--are simply not adequate. We will have to reach for a level of concern and expenditure a good deal beyond what we are accustomed to if we are to solve these problems; we will have to reach a level of cooperation between agencies in a city and among the city and the State and Federal Government that goes far beyond anything we have yet achieved. We will have to have a new magnitude of involvement of citizens and of city leadership.

Here in Cincinnati you have had the particularly frustrating experience of having a high degree of integration in a number of your schools and yet having these schools explode into disorder. Such incidents seem to deny the value of racial cooperation and integration. What can any of us say to the Negro or white parent whose child has been frightened or threatened or even physically hurt? Neither rational explanation nor idealistic exhortation is likely to satisfy. What we adults have to accept is that children will sometimes be both the heroes and the victims of the changes which are underway. We need to do all we can to protect them, but from time to time we shall fail.

I suspect it does not particularly matter what the mechanics of a school district's approach to racial isolation might be--the decentralization plan for New York City appears to be the opposite of Justice Wright's proposal for Washington, D.C. (one would enlarge the school system and cross the political jurisdictions; the other would narrow the system and create smaller jurisdictions). In either case--in almost any case you care to name--the obvious virtue of these new plans, whatever their specific form, is that they are aimed at bringing about constructive change. When something is going on--when a city is vital and vigorous--such change can occur. And it must occur if we are to honor our commitments to all our citizens and to achieve the unique potential of the American society.

We cannot lightly set our sights on these objectives, for their attainment will test this Nation as severely as it has ever been tested

before. For a time, at least, we may encounter failure as often as success. There will be bitter, unpleasant experiences for every one of us, black and white alike.

But the most important consideration is that the drive for equal educational opportunity has entered a critical phase. Today it is at last being waged in the only places and in the only way that can determine the ultimate outcome--in the States and local communities and at State and local initiative. Theory and principle are giving way to action. Having put desegregation on their agenda, the schools now and in the years ahead will be at the center of our social revolution. They will be there over the issue of who goes to school with whom, and they will be there also as the arbiters of who achieves success in a society which requires success in education in order to participate and to enjoy freedom.

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